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Historical Address
on
St. Michael's Parish
Litchfield, Connecticut

BY
The REV. WILLIAM J. BREWSTER, Rector.



Delivered at the time of the last Sunday Service
in the Third Church Building on the old site, June
29th, 1919, the building being on rollers preparatory
for the moving.



$$\frac{1}{2} \left(\frac{1}{2} + \frac{1}{2} \right) = \frac{1}{2}$$

Figure 1: 2000~



This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.—Gen. 28:17.

Human nature is most susceptible to association. That is why we love our homes, our country; that is why we here love this church. The kind of association connected with a place or building molds the feelings in regard to it. Every people loves and holds sacred its place of worship. It is a universal trait of human character. The presence of God we worship sanctifies even the very ground we are on.

On this last Sunday of our worship in this building on this holy ground it seemed that a brief review of the facts connected with the early history of St. Michael's Parish, and this building especially, would be interesting to all here. They are part of the reasons for our regard for this place. The other reasons are personal. Most of these personal reasons no tongue can tell, especially mine. My associations are tender; much more yours of two generations length. What I am about to relate may be an old story to some, but to a younger generation new, and to all at least a reminder of the making and growth of St. Michael's, Litchfield—our inheritance. This survey of one hundred and seventy-four years must necessarily be brief.

From a record privately penned in the Bible of Mrs. Deborah Plumb, who was the first child baptized according to the Church service in Litchfield, we learn of a meeting November 5, 1745, when thirteen heads of families met and decided to conform to the Church of England in Litchfield. Mr. John Davies, a native of England, was under God the father of St. Michael's parish. He gave it its name, and his money and devotion were instrumental in erecting the first church building in the spring of 1749. That first building was about one mile west of the present center of this village, the exact location not being known. In the lease of the land on which the church was built, from Mr. Davies to the "Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts" was this peculiar price of the rental, viz: "Yielding and paying therefor one

peppercorn annually, at or upon the feast of St. Michael, the Archangel, if lawfully demanded." From this circumstance, Mr. Davies insisted that the name should be St. Michael's. A tablet to the memory of Mr. Davies is near the chancel of this church.

The first building was used for worship until December, 1812, when the second building of the parish was completed on the present site, the land being given by Samuel Marsh, Esq. This second church was probably about three years in building but was finally completed and used in 1812, but not consecrated until 1824.

We have the subscription paper which was used in collecting the funds for the second church building in 1809-1812, also a copy of a sketch of the building made by Dr. Crane, of Waterbury, in 1842. Before this, in October, 1784, the Revolutionary War having intervened and the independence of the United States following, there was organized the First Episcopal Society of Litchfield, according to the laws of the State of Connecticut. This society is the legal organization composed of St. Michael's, Litchfield, St. Paul's, Bantam, and Trinity, Milton. In 1884 was duly celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of this event.

In 1850, a meeting was called to consider the condition of the church. It needed repairs badly and also enlarging to meet the growing needs of the parish. It was then decided advisable to build a new church. The old building was sold for \$300, and taken down in the spring of 1851. Rev. Truman Marsh, at eighty-four years of age, saw the church, built in his early rectorate, demolished. He died before the new church was built, and was buried from the Congregational Church, Bishop Brownell officiating.

The corner stone of this church we are now in was laid July 15, 1851; it was completed December 10, 1851; and consecrated December 16, 1851.

It is not known what the first church building cost, nor of what style it was. The one built in 1809-1812 cost \$1,600. This present building cost \$6,408, or complete with carpet, furniture, etc., \$7,241, and was ready for occupancy six months from the laying of the corner stone.

On April 11, 1894, in a strong east wind, the steeple blew over, and the cross being broken in the trees, the point of the

spire penetrated about three feet into the ground opposite the entrance, and the part about thirty feet long finally swayed against the Church, doing no further damage than breaking one light of glass. In 1881 the galleries were removed. In 1882 the reredoes and wainseating were put in the chancel; also the chancel rail and the brass tablet in memory of the three Rectors of the parish whose lives were ended in Litchfield—Rev. Solomon Palmer, Rev. Truman Marsh, and Rev. Isaac Jones. In 1857, the widow of Rev. Mr. Marsh gave the present Rectory, and the chapel was built.

The history of two chairs in the chancel is interesting. They were the property of Oliver Wolcott, Jr. He was treasurer of the United States, succeeding Alexander Hamilton, 1785-1800. The chairs were brought from Philadelphia to Litchfield in 1812 with his other household effects. He was Governor of Connecticut, 1818-1827. Having later become the property of his son, Dr. John S. Wolcott, and in bad repair, they were secured by Mr. D. C. Buckley (father of Edward Buckley), repaired and placed in the chancel of the second church building in 1837. Mr. Buckley also made the chair used as the Bishop's Chair for many years, until the new one was given by Mr. and Mrs. Francis Wells, of Philadelphia, in 1882. In 1874 the font was given in memory of Gerard S. Wiggin. In 1879 the window in memory of Miss Maria Seymour was put in by the Sunday School. In 1881 the window in memory of Dr. A. S. Lewis, and in 1882 the one in memory of Hon. O. S. Seymour, L.L.D., were given. In 1884 was placed the Hosea Webster window. In 1886, the Alms basin and two offertory plates, in memory of Mrs. Clarinda Harrison Sanford, were given by her son. In 1887, at Christmas, the altar was given by Mrs. N. R. Childs. In 1888 and '89 the altar cloths were embroidered by Mrs. L. P. Bissell. In 1889 the window in memory of Mrs. Hornblower was given, and in 1892 the brass lecturn in memory of Webster Belden. In 1892 the Prayer Desk, in memory of Mrs. Sarah Brush Duffie, was given by her son. In 1893 the Pulpit was given in memory of Hon. Edward W. Seymour and in 1893 the window in his memory was given both by his widow. In 1895 the St. Michael's window in memory of Miss Caroline and Miss Celeste Parmalee was placed in the chancel. In 1895, November 5, there

was an appropriate celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Parish. In 1911 the present organ was given in memory of Hon. Edward W. Seymour. On Ascension Day, 1914, was dedicated the window to Mrs. Mary Seymour, given by her many friends. In 1917 the window in memory of Mr. and Mrs. William G. Walbridge was given. In 1917 the National and State flags in memory of Charlotte Sanford Seymour were given by her grandparents. And now we must chronicle the largest gift in the history of the Parish. Mr. Henry R. Towne has offered to build, and the vestry has accepted, a stone church in memory of his wife, Cora M. Towne. It came as a great surprise to us all last winter, just when the Vestry had voted a committee on a Church Building Fund, knowing that soon the present building must be replaced. We all hope Mr. Towne may see his plans fully accomplished. A fund has been started and will be added to from time to time until large enough to build the proposed Storrs O. Seymour Memorial Parish House.

To single out a few names as worthy of especial mention in the life of this Parish of 174 years may be unfair. But little doubt has ever been expressed that in the beginning Mr. John Davies, Mr. Landon and Mr. Griswold were the real founders of the parish. Among others, Mr. Moses Seymour, Mr. Ephraim Kirby, Hon. Seth P. Beers, Hon. O. S. Seymour, Dr. J. G. Beekwith, Dr. Algernon S. Lewis, Hon. Edward W. Seymour should be mentioned.

Among the Rectors it is interesting to mention Rev. Ashbel Baldwin; a native of Litchfield who was ordained Deacon by Bishop Seabury at Middletown, August 3, 1783, at the first Episcopal ordination in this country, and he was the first to be ordained; and was the first Rector under the organization of the First Episcopal Society of Litchfield.

The Rectors who have officiated in this Church building are: Rev. J. J. Brandigee, 1851-54; Rev. Junius M. Willey, 1855-58; Rev. Henry N. Hudson, 1858-60, (the Shakespearian scholar); Rev. William S. Southgate, 1860-64; Rev. William S. Perry, 1864-69, (afterwards Bishop of Iowa); Rev. C. S. Henry, 1870-73; Rev. G. M. Wilkins, 1874-79; Rev. S. O. Seymour, 1879-83; Rev. L. P. Bissell, 1884-93; when Rev. S. O. Seymour again became Rector until 1916. He was Rector altogether

twenty-seven years and Rector Emeritus two years, five months, until his death in September, 1918. All of these have passed to their reward, but we may well say "their works do follow them."

We have brought to mind some of the material and personal interests which are important in the life of a Parish. In 1895, when the Parish celebrated its 150th anniversary, Bishop Williams sent the following letter which beautifully emphasizes the spiritual influences which cluster about this Parish, and we know about this Church building, for those now living. "The contrast between the **then** of 150 years ago and the **now** is most striking, and one thought comes to me constantly in connection with these anniversaries — the permanency of the Parishes. Go back 150 years and think of all the changes that have come in the world, with its dynasties, its nations, its wars, its advances, and then remember that in all these years, as they piled themselves up in human history, the same worship, the same teaching, pastoral charge, parochial ministrations have gone on here in a quiet round of duty, and what a view is presented to us! How many have been received into the Church of God by baptism, how many have come to receive the "laying on of hands," how many have knelt in the Holy Eucharist, how many cries of penitent sorrow have gone up to the ears of God, how many have had the peace of the Comforter sent to them, over how many have the blessed words that speak of the victory over death been spoken! It were easy to go on with thoughts like these, but each will have them, I am sure, in mind. Thankful then for all the past, rejoicing in the present, hopeful for the future, let us all say in our hearts and with our lips "not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise," "The Lord our God be with us as he was with our Fathers."

This fabric, perishable, is now to be replaced by an imperishable stone structure, and we believe the closing verse of the poem by a former Rector's wife prophetic:

"As all that live must die and rise again
In fairer guise our Church will live once more
To celebrate with youth renewed and fresh
Full many a glad and glorious Easter Day."

God grant we may all see the fulfillment of this prophecy.

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